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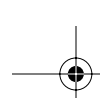
## EVERYONE HAS A DOT

Maybe you have heard of the social experiment in which ten people were to interview at a company. Before they went to the office for the interview, a red dot was painted on one cheek of each interviewee. Each interviewee was to go into the office and sit across the desk from the interviewer. After each interview, the interviewee was debriefed. Each of the ten interviewees stated that the interviewer kept staring at the dot on his or her cheek.

Here is the kicker: Out of the ten who received a painted dot, five—unbeknownst to them—were actually given a clear dot that was not visible on their skin. Yet they still felt as if the interviewer was focusing on their dot. From this experiment we learn that people feel self-conscious about whatever makes them insecure. That insecurity might relate to one's weight, gender, race or any other distinctive that is viewed as a negative in society. Do you ever feel like people are focusing on your red dot?

When I was pulled over by police officers in the suburbs of Chicago four times within a single day, I knew that my racial



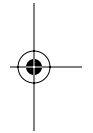


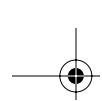
dot was bright and noticeable. At first I told myself that I was being self-conscious. I tried to convince myself that race was not the issue. After the second stop, though, I knew that race was the issue whether or not I could ever prove it.

### DOTISM

It's no secret that North America used to be notorious around the world for heinous acts of slavery followed by an era of institutionalized racial discrimination and segregation. Racial prejudice was a proud badge of honor for many in the United States in generations past. There was a time when only white was right and everything else from Native American, to African, to Chinese, to Jewish was wrong. But this is not the case anymore. The social acceptability of overt racism is over. By and large (notwithstanding the sovereign hand of the Almighty), it was the great struggle of blacks for their freedom, with the help of courageous whites and others, that pulled America out of the muck and mire of institutionalized bigotry.

Because our world is still racialized, racial discussions often feel forced, unsafe and either overplayed or underaddressed. When you have groups of people in a country who feel like they have dots on their face, and have been made to feel that their dots are ugly, unwanted and limiting to their success, you will also find corresponding behaviors that contribute to their self-perceptions. Many with dots feel as if they must over-achieve in order to succeed in society. Some feel that hope is





lost and there is no reason to strive. Hopelessness can be a weapon of mass destruction.

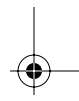
Over the decades many dotted people have been wrongly accused and denied employment, promotions or housing. Many people have been beaten, jailed and hung out to dry because of their dots. So after a while dotted persons understandably feel as though their dottedness is a liability. They feel as though they are being prejudged based on their facial dot.

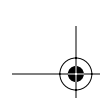
**REAL LIFE**

I just returned home from consulting for a large corporate client in the heartland of the United States. One of the stories I received from an African American woman who works at the company was about her most recent racialized experience on the job. A white coworker placed a cotton plant on her desk and told her to pick it. I'm sure you can imagine how appalled the woman was. The man who did this was confronted about his distasteful act. He explained that he was simply joking.

Having spoken to the woman, it was evident to me that she didn't find the joke humorous. What was most disturbing to the black woman, as she states it, was that this man felt comfortable with this kind of joking as an acceptable prank in his work environment. After more than ten years with the company, this woman had hoped that her dot of racial distinction was vanishing.

While these kinds of racial tensions and misunderstandings still exist, minorities aren't the only ones feeling misjudged and





prejudged. White males are beginning to get frustrated with what inclusion might mean for them in this increasingly multicultural society.

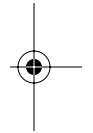
### THE COLOR OF CHANGE

In the case of the dotted interview experiment, imagine the white male as the interviewer. After the interview one of the interviewee states, "He was staring at my dot the whole time." He is a dotist, in other words. The interviewee didn't realize that there was no dot on her face. How do you think the interviewer feels as he honestly protests that he didn't notice any dot? Both persons feel hurt and misunderstood.

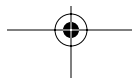


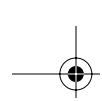
### WHITE MALES

America finds itself at a time in history when the white male is becoming a minority figure. The white man has a dot of his own. Some whites may already feel as if they are targeted as racists and have been silenced on issues of social justice and excluded from the table of diversity. They are beginning to feel accused and victimized by public opinion as the oppressor. There was a time when the majority of white men enjoyed their positions of power as a privilege that was unchallenged. Now the push for diversity and multiculturalism feels threatening, and many white men are wondering whether they are a part of the inclusion.



Many of my white male brothers do not want to be associated with racism, injustice or power. They are tired of being





prejudged before they are even given a chance to speak. God forbid that they slip and use the wrong terminology as it relates to other races or women. These men are feeling the squeeze. Some are fully engaged in the cultural shift and welcome the opportunity to include others, while other white men are resentful and protective of positions of power and privilege. If diversity is done right, everyone—including whites—should feel welcomed at the table of ideas and leadership.

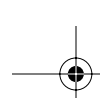
I have many white and Asian friends who have never placed a cotton plant on the desk of a black person at work, nor have they launched racial epithets at minorities. Yet they have been accused of racism simply by disagreeing with the NAACP on a stance or by questioning the policies of affirmative action in colleges or workplaces. Is this dotism or disagreement?

#### **PLAYING THE DOT CARD**

Some people's dots are invisible and yet they still see everything through the lens of their perceived dot. They feel threatened, cheated and judged, only to discover in their post-interview debriefing that dotism was not the issue at all, because the interviewer saw no dot on their face.

The interviewer wonders, "How can you accuse me of dotism? I didn't even see a dot." The interviewer also feels frustrated, threatened and judged. He doesn't see a dot on the alleged victim's face. And therein lies the struggle with race in North America. Perception versus reality; trust versus betrayal; education versus experience; relationship versus isolation. This





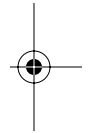
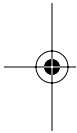
is the context within which we find ourselves doing life and ministry, friend.

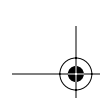
### A SIN PROBLEM

Racism is not reserved for one color or culture of people. The sin of racism is an equal opportunity employer. (Or should I say an equal opportunity destroyer?) Racism is not simply a skin problem but is a sin problem. While this may sound like a cliché, we must continue to sound the alarm that God hates sin but loves sinners. Continual reminders of the spiritual impact that sin has on people, including the sin of racism, is important so that everyone can see the negative consequences that affect many. All have sinned; all can sin, regardless of race. Therefore, it is important to note that blacks can be racists too.

While walking down the street one day I heard a black man using racially pejorative language referring to Mexicans. It made me think about the universality of sin, regardless of race. Even in my own multicultural church we have to disciple people out of racist mindsets. We have heard and confronted negative racial language (much of which comes from habit) about Asians, whites, blacks and Hispanics. The most common racial giant to slay these days is prejudice against Arabs, most of whom are Muslims.

All people struggle with sins of superiority, inferiority and greed rooted in history. This includes not only Europeans, Spaniards and white Americans who perpetrated slavery but also some Africans who sold their brothers and sisters into





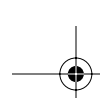
American slavery a hundred years ago. It further includes the many onlooking countries, corporations and religious denominations that either turned their heads or directly benefited from the horrors of American slavery.

**EVERYONE HAS A DOT**

We now live in a country that is pulling itself out of the muddy waters of racism as an acceptable public practice. In North America everyone has some sort of dot of distinction. Whether white, black, Mexican, female, male, gay, straight, disabled or overweight, everyone has a dot of distinction. And everyone has the capability of putting someone else down based on that person's color, culture or class. No matter its form, dotism still exists because sin still exists. And would it not be a tragedy to see people of color turn around and become the most vicious dotists of all against others? Would it not be a terrible cultural shift to see women step on the masculinity of their gender counterparts to gain their liberation? Whether the pendulum of dotism swings to one extreme or the other, it is just as debased and evil.

There must be an answer to dotism that doesn't leave people feeling left out, judged and discriminated against. There must be an answer for those in the power position who declare their innocence and swear to the world that they saw no dot on the interviewee's face. There must be a theological response to racism in the culture and racial segregation in the church. Right? There is—it's gracism.





### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Are you aware of your personal “red dot” (whatever makes you feel insecure around others, such as race, gender, age, weight, facial feature, emotional or physical disability)? How do you manage your feelings about it?
2. Do you sometimes try to overcompensate for your red dot when you relate to others, especially those who don’t know you? If so, how?
3. Can you recall a time of discouragement or even despair over your “red dot”? What circumstances brought on those emotions?
4. Racism is a sin that can be committed by any identity group against another. How have you experienced someone making judgments about you because you were part of a certain identity group?
5. What are the factors that are helping our society to minimize dotism? What are the factors that are still promoting dotism? Which factors (one from each list) is the easiest for you to engage in?

